

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

IO-13 EB-07 TRSE-00 /084 W

-----061730Z 093876 /43

R 061653Z JAN 77

FM AMEMBASSY RABAT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 689

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

USUN NEW YORK 1227

C O N F I D E N T I A L RABAT 108

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, MO, AG, MR, SA, SS

SUBJECT: SAHARA RHETORIC UP AGAIN

1. IN THE WAKE OF THE BOUTEFLIKA TO WALDHEIM LETTER ACKNOWLEDGING FAILURE OF THE SAUDI GOOD OFFICES BETWEEN MOROCCO AND ALGERIA (76 ALGIERS 3041), ANTI-ALGERIAN RHETORIC HAS REAPPEARED IN THE LOCAL PRESS WITH A VENGEANCE. ARTICLES BY ALGERIAN POLITICAL EXILES ARE CARRIED ALMOST DAILY IN THE SEMI-OFFICIAL PRESS. IN A LONG AND UNUSUALLY HARSH DEC 31 EDITORIAL, SEMI-OFFICIAL LE MATIN'S PUBLISHER AHMED ALAOUI POINTED TO "LIES" AND "FALSIFICATIONS" IN THE BOUTEFLIKA LETTER. HE REITERATED THAT MOROCCO HAD NO CONCESSIONS TO MAKE, BLAMED ALGERIA FOR THE SAUDI FAILURE, AND REPEATED THE THEME, "RECONCILIATION, YES; CONCESSIONS, NEVER." HE WENT ON TO ATTACK THE ALGERIAN REGIME AS ONE OF "AGGRESSIONS...BASED ON USURPATION, CONFISCATION, AND OPPRESSION," AND ENDED BY STATING THAT THE "ONLY" PROBLEM AT HAND WAS THAT "DISGRACEFUL" REGIME.

2. MEANWHILE, MOROCCAN SAHARA CASUALTY FIGURES FOR NOVEMBER HAVE BEEN LOW AND SEEM TO BELIE POLISARIO CLAIMS OF INCREASED
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ACTIVITY. DECEMBER FIGURES, HOWEVER, COULD DISPEL THIS IMPRESSION. ONE THEORY FOR THE LOW CASUALTY FIGURES IS THAT THE SAUDI EFFORT, LAUNCHED IN MID-NOVEMBER, WAS BEGINNING TO HAVE AN IMPACT. A MORE COMMON EXPLANATION, ADVANCED BY MOROCCANS, IS THAT THEIR (STILL-UNPUBLICIZED) CROSS-BORDER OPERATIONS INTO ALGERIA AND IMPROVED CONTROL ON THE GROUND WERE RESPONSIBLE.

3. COMMENT: THE REALITY OF THE GROUND IN THE SAHARA AS USUAL REMAINS ELUSIVE. IT IS STILL TOO EARLY TO ASSESS HOW THE NEW ELEMENT OF SMALL-SCALE MOROCCAN CROSS-BORDER STRIKES MAY AFFECT MILITARY AND DIPLOMATIC PLAY.

4. AS TO OTHER THAN SAUDI DIPLOMATIC EFFORTS, THERE IS CURRENTLY NO PUBLIC FOCUS ON THE PROJECTED EXTRAORDINARY OAU SUMMIT ON THE SAHARA, AND MOROCCAN OFFICIALS CONTINUE IN PRIVATE TO DISCOUNT ITS BEING HELD. MEANWHILE, RETURN TO A HIGH LEVEL OF ANTI-ALGERIAN PRESS POLEMICS IS WELL UNDERWAY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CONCILIATION, SELFDETERMINATION, TERRITORIAL CLAIMS, INTERNATIONAL ARBITRATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 06-Jan-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977RABAT00108
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770005-1311
Format: TEL
From: RABAT
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770175/aaaacnmn.tel
Line Count: 73
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d56eb8dc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12-Nov-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3651940
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SAHARA RHETORIC UP AGAIN
TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, PDEV, AG, MR, SA, SS, MO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d56eb8dc-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009